

Contemporary Moral Problems

Ryan Christian V. Aquino



10

Chapter 1

James Rachels: Egoism and Skepticism

What I expect to learn: I want to learn egoism and skepticism and their importance.

Quote: "We should consider everyone who is capable of suffering including non human animals."

Review: In this chapter James Rachels says that Psychological Egoism lets us understand that we can act unselfishly because we are doing our action based on what we know is right for us and for others. While Ethical Egoism is saying that everyone has its own rational self-interest and that is what is good for them or us.

For me, this chapter is all about teaching what selfishness and what unselfishness is. In this chapter, it discusses The Legend of Gyges is all about a shepherd who found a ring in a fissure caused by an earthquake, which the ring can make the wearer invisible and enable him to go anywhere and do anything undetected. Gyges used the power of the ring to gain entry to the Royal Palace where he seduced the Queen and murdered the King and subsequently seized the throne. In this case, it simply describes men are selfish because of their self-interests and selfishness is an egoism. Egoism has two views, the psychological egoism and ethical egoism. Psychological Egoism is the view that all men are selfish in everything that they do, that is, that the only motive from which anyone ever acts is self-interest. Ethical Egoism is, by contrast, a normative view about how men ought to act. It is the view that, regardless of how men do in fact behave, they have no obligation to do anything except what it is in their own interests. This chapter explains that it is up to the person whether he would do something just for his self-interest or for the benefit of the majority or the many.

What I have learned: I learned the different concepts/theories of egoism and skepticism and also some people are selfish and some aren't.

Integrative Question:

1. What is Egoism?
2. What is Skepticism?
3. How do you know if something is immoral or not?
4. Who is James Rachels?
5. What is the legend of Gyges all about?

Chapter 2

John Arthur: Religion, Morality and Conscience

What I expect to learn: I expect to learn the interrelationship of religion, morality and conscience.

Quote: "Morality is social."

Review: Mainly this chapter is all about knowing the relationship between religion and morality. About how the two are different with each other or whether the two are one and the same. According to John Arthur, morality and religion is different for the reason that morality involves our attitudes toward various forms of behaviour, typically expressed using the notions of rules, rights and obligations. On the other hand, religion, typically involves prayer, worship, beliefs about the supernatural, institutional forms and authoritative texts. Morality and Religion are connected for the reason that without religious motivation people could not be expected to do the right thing; that religion is necessary to provide guidance and/or reason for people in their search for the correct course of action; and that religion is essential for determining right and wrong.

John Arthur also mentioned in this chapter that morality is inherently social. It depends on socially learned language. It is learned from interactions with others and governs interactions with others in society. God might play a role in moral reflection and conscience. For the religious person, conscience would almost certainly include the imagined reaction of God along with the reactions of others who might be affected by the action. For a religious person, morality and God's will cannot be separated.

What I have learned: I have gained addition knowledge regarding the interconnectivity of religion, morality and conscience.

Integrative Questions:

1. What is the difference of religion and morality?
2. How are the three topics related to each other?
3. What is conscience?
4. Is morality a necessity in religion? Vice versa?
5. Is morality based on religion? Vice versa?

Chapter 3

Friedrich Nietzsche: Master morality and Slave Morality

What I expect to learn: I expect to learn how a master and slave relationship can have morality.

Quote: "The noble soul accepts the fact of his egoism without question and without consciousness of harshness, constraints and arbitrariness."

Review: In this chapter Friedrich Nietzsche mentioned that the essential thing in a good and healthy aristocracy is that it should not regard itself as a function either of the kingship or the commonwealth but as the significance and the highest justification that it should accept with a good conscience. Its fundamental belief must be precisely that society is not allowed to exist for its own sake but only as a foundation and scaffolding by means of which a select class of beings may be able to elevate themselves to their higher duties and in general to a higher existence. One is said to think profoundly to the very basis and resist all sentimental weakness: life itself is essentially appropriation, injury, and conquest of the strange and weak, suppression, severity, obtrusions of peculiar forms, incorporation and at the least putting it mildest exploitation. It is obvious that everywhere the designations of moral value were at first applied to men, and were only derivatively and at a later period applied to actions. Slave morality is essentially the morality of utility. Here is the seat of the origin of the famous antithesis "good" and "evil". It is an additional instance of his egoism, this artfulness and self-limitation in intercourse with his equals every star is a similar egoist. He honours himself in them and in the rights which he concedes to them he has no doubt that the exchange of honours and rights.

What I have learned: I learned about master and slave morality and about justification and good conscience. And about how people use their power.

Integrative Questions:

1. What is master morality?
2. What is slave morality?
3. What is master slave morality?
4. What is a "creator of values"?
5. How do you determine who experiences master morality, slave morality?

Chapter 4

Mary Midgley: Trying Out One's New Sword

What I expect to learn: I expect to learn new ideas on ethics.

Quote: "Information society"

Review: Midgley revokes moral isolation; moral isolation says that people cannot criticize customs and/or cultures that they don't belong to. She says that people should first understand a culture before they can judge it. This chapter is about studying other cultures and about what is moral isolationism. This chapter also discusses about what could be the basis in criticizing other cultures. Midgley thinks that the way of life of our own is the basis of criticizing other cultures. He implies that why do we judge other culture if we could judge our own culture.

What I have learned: I have learned to deeply respect other cultures.

Integrative Questions:

- 1.) What is moral isolationism?
- 2.) What is moral judgement?
- 3.) Why do we need to be aware of other cultures?
- 4.) What is Tsujigiri?
- 5.) What is the basis in criticizing other cultures?

Chapter 5

John Stuart Mill: Utilitarianism

What I expect to learn: I expect to learn what utilitarianism is all about.

Quote: "The end of human action, is necessarily also the standard of morality"

Review: For me, this chapter about studying happiness and pleasure. This describes whether who should be happy oneself or the majority. This chapter also describes the implication of the principle of utility. The Principle of Utility or the greatest happiness principle states that the actions are right in proportion if they tend to promote happiness, wrong if they tend to generate the reverse of happiness. Happiness is intended pleasures and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and deprivation of pleasures. It also describes what higher and lower pleasure is and what their differences are. The higher pleasure is the one that all who have experience of both give a resolute preference, irrespective of any judgment of moral duty to favour it. While the lower pleasure is when those who are competently acquainted with both place so far above the other that they desire it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of unhappiness, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasures which their nature can attain. This chapter also describes whose happiness must be considered.

What I have learned: I learned the meaning of utilitarianism and I have learned how to apply to my everyday life.

Integrative Questions:

- 1.) What is utilitarianism?
- 2.) What is higher pleasure?
- 3.) What is lower pleasure?
- 4.) Whose happiness should be considered?
- 5.) How higher and lower pleasure are connected?

Chapter 6

James Rachels: The Debate over Utilitarianism

What I expect to learn: I expect to learn the negative side of utilitarianism.

Quote: "Right actions are those that have the best consequences."

Review: Basically this chapter is about Rachels' view on utilitarianism.

The first argument is when we judge our actions based on what we know is right and wrong. Hedonism is about pleasure and nothing is bad when your actions come from pleasure because you are just satisfying your needs as a human being. The response of the defenders of utilitarianism to hedonism is their two doctrines: the good and the right.

Second argument is when we think about the end result of our action after we judge it and thus making the right actions the greatest producers of balance of happiness over unhappiness. Utilitarianism is regarding pleasure and what is good and right pleasure in a human being to have.

According to Rachels, the trouble about Hedonism is it gets things the wrong way around. Hedonism misunderstands the very nature of happiness. Happiness isn't something that is recognized as good and sought for its own sake, with other things appreciated only as means of bringing it. It also distinguishes what is rule-utilitarianism and act-utilitarianism. Rule-utilitarianism is the new version of the theory which rules are established by reference to the principle and individual's acts will then be judged right and wrong by reference to the rules. Act-utilitarianism is the original theory.

What I have learned: I have learned Rachels' view on utilitarianism, and why she thinks utilitarianism is bad.

Integrative Questions:

- 1.) What is hedonism?
- 2.) What is rule-utilitarianism?
- 3.) What is act-utilitarianism?
- 4.) What is the utilitarian doctrine?
- 5.) Where can we find utilitarianism today?

Chapter 7

Immanuel Kant: The Categorical Imperative

What I expect to learn: I expect to learn the definition of Categorical Imperative and its importance.

Quote: ""Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."

Review: This chapter is all about studying what a person can do for love of self. In this Chapter Kant described that good will is that it is impossible to conceive anything at all in the world or even out of it, which can be taken as good without condition, except a good will. A good will is not good because of what it affects or accomplishes but because of its fitness for attaining some proposed end, it is good through its willing alone that is, good in itself. He also described what is hypothetical and categorical imperatives. According to Kant, when he conceives Hypothetical Imperatives in general he does not know beforehand what it will contain until its condition is known. But if he conceives Categorical Imperatives, he knows at once what it contains. He also explains that the categorical imperative can be used to rationalize immoral actions.

What I have learned: I have learned what categorical imperatives are.

Integrative questions:

- 1.) What is goodwill?
- 2.) What is categorical imperative?
- 3.) What is hypothetical imperative?
- 4.) What is duty?
- 5.) How can we define goodwill?

Chapter 8

Aristotle: Happiness and Virtue

What I expect to learn: I expect to learn on the interrelationship of happiness and virtue.

Quote: "All Human Beings Seek Happiness."

Review: According to Aristotle, happiness isn't pleasure, honour, or wealth. Happiness in his definition is associated to virtue because based on what Aristotle said happiness is an activity of the soul with accordance with virtue. Aristotle mentioned that happiness is related to virtue. He also pointed out the two kinds of Virtue: Moral and Intellectual. He said that moral virtue comes from training and habit. Also, he said that moral virtue is a state of character that is a mean among the vices of excess and deficiency. On the other hand, Aristotle defined intellectual virtue as the most perfect happiness and is found in the activity of reason or contemplation. Happiness is related to pleasure in the sense that based on what Aristotle said that most men seem to identify happiness with pleasure that is why they love the life of enjoyment. He said that moral virtue comes from training and habit. He pointed out that moral virtue is a state of character that is a mean between the vices of excess and deficiency. As an example to that is courage as a mean between the boundaries of rashness and cowardice. Based on how I comprehend the content I think it is possible for everyone in our society to be happy. Everyone can be happy but to what happiness differs depending on the aspect that a certain person finds fulfilment. In example to that, for some, pleasure can be a form of happiness while for others it may be honour or wealth. There are a lot of reasons for a person to be happy and every person has a different approach to happiness.

What I have learned: I have learned that for Aristotle happiness is a virtue.

Integrative Questions:

- 1.) What are the two kinds of virtue?
- 2.) What is happiness?
- 3.) How are the two connected?
- 4.) What is moral virtue?
- 5.) What is intellectual virtue?

Chapter9

Joel Feinberg: The Nature and Value of Rights

What I expect to learn: I expect to have a deeper understanding regarding rights.

Quote: "We can make the human beings in it as attractive and virtuous as possible without taxing our conceptions of the limits of human nature."

Review: For me, this chapter is all about discussing the importance of human rights. Feinberg demonstrate the importance of human rights by imagining Nowheresville, a world like our own except that people do not have rights. As a result, people in this world cannot make moral claims when they are treated unjustly. They cannot demand or claim just treatment, and so they are deprived of self-respect and human dignity. Feinberg also explains the doctrine of the logical correlativity of rights and duties is the doctrine that all duties entail other people's rights and all rights entails other people's duties. Fienberg also explain that a personal desert is when a person is said to deserve something good from us what is meant in parts is that there would be certain proprietary in our giving that good thing to him in virtue of kind of person he is, perhaps, or more likely, in virtue of some specific thing he has done.

What I have learned: I learned that respecting human rights is very important I and that the repercussions of violating rights awful.

Integrative Questions:

- 1.) What is nowheresville?
- 2.) What are rights?
- 3.) What is a personal desert?
- 4.) What are claim rights?
- 5.) Where can we find nowheresville in our current situation?

Chapter10

Ronald Dworkin: Taking Rights Seriously

What I expect to learn: I expect to learn why we need to take rights seriously.

Quote: "If the Government does not take rights seriously, then it does not take law seriously either."

Review: For me, this chapter is all about discussing the meaning of taking rights seriously. Dworkin explained that right in the strong sense means that if a people have a right to do something, then it is wrong to interfere with them. For example, if citizen have a right to free speech, then it is wrong for the government to interfere with the exercise of this right. He also distinguishes between legal and moral right. Moral Rights are rights which are not contingent upon the laws, customs, or beliefs or a particular society or polity in contrast. Legal rights are rights conveyed by a particular polity, codified into legal statutes by some form of legislature, and as such are contingent upon local laws, customs, or beliefs. According to Dworkin the institution of right must require an act of faith on the part of the minorities and the second was the Government will not re-establish respect of law without giving the law some claim to respect.

What I have learned: I learned the consequences violating rights.

Integrative questions:

- 1.) What is legal right?
- 2.) What is moral right?
- 3.) How are things considered right?
- 4.) What do controversial right mean?
- 5.) What are the requirements of a constitution right?

Chapter 11

John Rawls: A Theory of Justice

What I expect to learn: I expect to learn the definition and application of justice.

Review: In this part of the book, Rawls's theory states that there are two principles of justice: The first principle involves equal basic liberties, and the second principle concerns the arrangement of social and economic inequalities. According to Rawls's theory, these are the principles that free and rational persons would accept in a hypothetical original position where there is a veil of ignorance hiding from the contractors all the particular facts about themselves. The first principle involves equal basic liberties. Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty of others. The second principle concerns the arrangement of social and economic inequalities. Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both, reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and attached to positions and offices open to all. These principles are to be arranged in a serial order with the first principle prior to the second. This ordering means that a departure from the institutions of equal liberty required by the first principle cannot be justified by, or compensated for, by greater social and economic advantages.

What I have learned: I have learned Rawls idea of justice and about the two principles of justice.

Integrative questions:

- 1.) What is Rawls theory?
- 2.) What is the main idea of theory of justice?
- 3.) What is the first principle of justice?
- 4.) What is the second principle of justice?
- 5.) How do you relate justice to fairness?

Chapter 12

Annette C. Baier: The Need for More than Justice

What I expect to learn: I expect to learn why we need justice.

Quote: “

Review: This is the last subtopic of chapter one written by Annette Baier where according to her, following Carol Gilligan, she distinguishes amid the justice perspective of philosophers such as Kant and Rawls and the care perspective Gilligan found in her studies of moral development of women. Baier argues that the justice perspective by itself is insufficient as a moral theory. It overlooks inequalities between people and it has an unrealistic view of freedom of choice and it ignores the importance of moral emotions such as love. The best moral theory, she claims, is one that harmonizes justice and care.

What I have learned: I have learned that justice is only an outer layer of ethics.

Integrative questions:

- 1.) What is justice perspective?
- 2.) Why is justice not enough?
- 3.) Is justice fair?
- 4.) What is the best moral theory?
- 5.) What is care perspective?